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SUBJECT: ANHUI CIVIL AFFAIRS BUREAU DISCUSSES JULY FLOODS

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Anhui Civil Affairs officials in a meeting with Poloff on July 26 described the current flooding as the most severe in 50 years. While the worst was likely over, the disaster had impacted 16 million people, displaced over half a million, destroyed 90,000 homes, and caused almost 10 billion RMB in economic damages. The central government was deeply concerned with the situation, with Premier Wen Jiabao having visited the region once and Vice Premier Hui Liangyu paying two visits to the flood scene. While not as severe as the smaller but more damaging flood in 2003, the provincial and local governments had already spent more than 150 million RMB (USD 20 million) in relief efforts. End summary.

Worst Floods since '54

¶2. (SBU) On July 26 Poloff and FSN Political Assistant met with Anhui Civil Affairs Office Disaster Relief Department Director Xue Kunming and Anhui Water Resources Office Deputy General Engineer Qiu Li to discuss recent flooding in Anhui, which they described as the worst flood since 1954. According to Qiu, heavy downpours in Henan Province began on June 29 with flooding occurring along the Huai, Chu, and Yan rivers. As of July 25, an area of 58,000 square kilometers had received 30 centimeters of precipitation, within which, an area of 38,900 square kilometers had received 40 centimeters of precipitation. The floodwaters had reached a peak of 25.59 meters. The central leadership was paying close attention to the floods. On July 5, Vice Premier Hui Liangyu visited Anhui to inspect the flood situation. Hui returned on July 13, accompanied by Premier Wen Jiabao, a move automatically triggered by the flood waters passing the warning level. In addition, President Hu Jintao has issued written directions on how to deal with the flood.

The Human Tragedy

¶3. (SBU) Xue said that the flood had impacted 16 million people

altogether, affecting the populations of 12 cities, nine along the Huai River and three in southern Anhui, including Chizhou, Xuancheng and Huangshan. Around 30 persons had perished during the flood but, Xue insisted, none had drowned. A tornado spawned by the thunderstorms killed seven people in Tianchang County near Yangzhou on July 4. Five or six people had been struck by lightning, and a number of people had perished as buildings collapsed. Altogether almost 90,000 homes had collapsed.

¶4. (SBU) A larger loss of human life had been prevented primarily due to three factors. First, the government had done a good job with water control projects, including reinforcing critical dikes. Second, a flood in 2003, while not as large as the current one, had destroyed over 870,000 homes, the vast majority of which had been rebuilt with better materials and better building techniques, making them better able to withstand this year's flood. Third, the Civil Affairs Office had evacuated 600,000 persons in advance of the flood. Most of the evacuees temporarily moved in with friends or relatives. The remainder were evacuated to public buildings on higher land, such as schools, or into temporary tent cities. Over 8,800 tents had been erected and because the tents often got very hot money had been provided to purchase tarps to put up emergency shelters without walls.

¶5. (SBU) Xue said people were beginning to return to their homes since the situation appeared to have stabilized. It had stopped raining on July 25 and Xue expected the waters would recede quickly. However, according to the Anhui website, rains began again in the evening of the 26th, forcing the evacuation of an additional 27,000 people along the Huai River as the flood crested for a fourth time. As of July 30, the Anhui government announced that, while it was still at the warning level, the flood was expected to gradually subside sometime into August.

Economic Costs Massive

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¶6. (SBU) Xue said that in total, 22 million mu of farmland had been flooded, with 7 million mu completely washed out. The flood resulted in close to 10 billion RMB in economic losses for Anhui Province. This included 6 billion in agricultural losses that would directly impact Anhui's poorer residents. The other four billion was in direct economic losses, such as washed out roads and bridges or collapsed homes.

Paying for the Tragedy

¶7. (SBU) According to Xue, the Anhui provincial government had allocated 89 million RMB (USD 11.87 million) to provide food, potable water, temporary shelter, clothing, and medicine for people in the affected areas. In addition, county and city level governments had spent another 28 million RMB (USD 3.73 million) in emergency relief funds. County and city level governments had also distributed two million kilograms of rice and flour. Thus far, Xue said, the government had been able to maintain social stability throughout the disaster and had also prevented any large-scale outbreak of communicable diseases. Xue declined to answer Poloff's question about how much--if any--funding the central government had provided.

¶8. (SBU) Neither contact knew whether or not there was NGO involvement in relief efforts at the local level. Xue said that while not actively seeking it, donations and volunteer labor were being accepted and utilized. Anhui had received more than 40 million RMB (USD 5.33 million) from local charities, businesses, private donors, and other city governments. They had also received several million RMB from Hong Kong donors. Volunteers were being directed to the Volunteer Association that was supervised by the Civil Affairs Office.

